The Land of Broken Promises

A Stirring Story of the Mexican Revolution

By DANE COOLIDGE

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A story of border Mexico, vivid, intense, such as has never before been written, is this one of American adventurers into the land of manana. Texan, mining engineer, Spanish senor and senorita, peon, Indian, crowd its chapters with clear-cut word pictures of business, adventure and love, against a somber background of wretched armies marching and countermarching across a land racked by revolution and without a savior.

"Boys," he said, "I'm feeling lucky today or I'd never have closed this deal. I'm letting you in on one of the biggest things that's ever been found in Sonora. Just to show you how good it is, here's my smelter receipts for eight hundred pounds of picked ore—one thousand and twenty-two dollars! That's the first and last ore that's ever been shipped from the old Eagle Tail. I dug it out myself, and sacked it and shipped it; and then some of them crooked Mexican officials tried to beat me out of my title and I blowed up the whole works with dynamite!

"Yes, sir, clean as a whistle! I had my powder stored away in the drift, and the minute I found out I was euchred I laid a fuse to it and brought the whole mountain down. That was ten years ago, and old Aragon and the agente mineral have had the land located ever since.

"I bet they've spent five thousand pesos trying to find that lead, but being nothing but a bunch of ignorant Mexicans, of course they never found nothing. Then Francisco Madero comes in and fires the agente mineral off his job and old Aragon lets the land revert for taxes. I've got a Mexican that keeps me posted, and ever since he sent me word that the title had lapsed I've been crazy to relocate that claim.

"Well, now, that don't look so bad, does it?" he asked, beaming paternally at Bud. "There ain't a man in town that wouldn't have jumped at the chance, if I was where I could talk about it, but that's just what I couldn't do. I had to find some stranger that wouldn't sense what mine I was talking about and then git him to go in on it blind.

"Now here's the way I'm fixed, boys," he exclaimed, brushing his unkempt beard and smiling craftily. "When I dynamited the Eagle Tail it was mine by rights, but Cipriano Aragon—he's the big Mexican down at old Fortuna—and Morales, the mineral agent, had buncoed me out of the title.

"So, according to law, I blowed up their mine, and if I ever showed up down there I reckon they'd throw me into jail. And if at any time they find out that you're working for me, why, we're ditched—that's all! They'll put you out of business. So, after we've made our agreement and I've told you what to do, I don't want to hear a word out of you—I don't want you to come near me, nor even write me a letter—just go ahead the best you can until you win out or go broke.

"It ain't a hard proposition," he continued, "if you keep your mouth shut, but if they tumble, it'll be a fight to a finish. I'm not saying this for you, Hooker, because I know you're safe; I'm saying it for your pardner here. You talk too much, Mr. De Lancey," he chided, eying him with sudden severity. "I'm afraid of ye!"

"All right,' broke in Hooker goodnaturedly, "I reckon we understand. Now go ahead and tell us where this mine is and who there is down there to look out for."

"The man to look out for," answered Kruger with venom, "is Cipriano Aragon. He's the man that bilked me out of the mine once, and he'll do it again if he can. When I went down there—it was ten years and more ago—I wasn't on to those Spanish ways of his, and he was so dog-goned polite and friendly I thought I could trust him anywhere.

"He owns a big ranch and mescal still, runs cattle, works a few placers, sends out pack-trains, and has every Mexican and Indian in the country in debt to him through his store, so if he happens to want any rough work done there's always somebody to do it.

"Well, just to show you how he did me, I got to nosing round those old Spanish workings east of Fortuna and finally I run across the ledge that I'm telling you about, not far from an abandoned shaft. But the Mexican mining laws are different from ours, and an American has lots of trouble anyway, so I made a trade with old Aragon that he should locate the claim for me under a power of attorney. Didn't know him then like I do now. The papers had to be sent to Moctezuma and Hermosillo, and to the City of Mexico and back, and while I was waiting around I dug in on this lead and opened up the prettiest vein of quarts you ever saw in your life. Here's a sample of it, and it's sure rich."

He handed De Lancey the familiar piece of quarts and proceeded with his story.

"That ore looked so good to me that I couldn't wait—I shipped it before I got my title. And right there I made my mistake. When Aragon saw the gold in that rock he just quietly recorded the concession in his own name and told me to go to blazes. That's the greaser of it! So I blew the whole mine up and hit for the border. That's the Dutch of it, I reckon," he added grimly. "Anyway, my old man was Dutch."

He paused, smiling over the memory of his misplaced credulity, and Hooker and De Lancey joined in a hearty laugh. From the town bum that he had first seemed this shabby little man had changed in their eyes until now he was a border Croesus, the mere recital of whose adventures conjured up in their minds visions of gold and hidden treasure.

The rugged face of Bud Hooker, which had been set in grim lines from the first, relaxed as the tale proceeded and his honest eyes glowed with admiration as he heard the well-planned scheme. As for De Lancey, he could hardly restrain his enthusiasm, and, drawn on by the contagion, Henry Kruger made maps and answered questions until every detail was settled.

After the location had been marked, and the lost tunnel charted from the corner monuments, he bade them remember it well and destroyed every vestige of paper. Then, as a final admonition, he said:

"Now go in there quietly, boys—don't hurry. Prospect around a little and the Mexicans will all come to you and try to sell you lost mines. Cruz Mendez is the man you're looking for—he's honest, and he'll take you to the Eagle Tail. After that you can use your own judgment. So good-by"—he took them by the hands—"and don't talk!"

He held up a warning finger as they parted, and Bud nodded briefly in reply. Silence was a habit with him, desert-bred, and he nodded his head for two.

CHAPTER IV.

From the times of David and Jonathan down to the present day the world has been full of young men sworn to friendship and seeking adventure in pairs. "Pardners," they call them in the west, and though the word has not crept into the dictionary yet, it is as different from "partner" as a friend is from a business associate.

They travel together, these pardners of the West, and whether they be cowboys or "Cousin Jacks," the boss who fires one of them fires both of them, and they go share and share in everything.

Bud Hooker and Philip De Lancey had met by chance in El Paso when the revolution was just beginning to boil and the city was swarming with adventurers. The agents of the rebels were everywhere, urging Americans to join their cause. Military preferment, cash payments, and grants of land were the baits they used, but Hooker stood out from the first and took De Lancey with him. A Mexican promise did not pass current where he was born and they went to the mines instead.

Then the war broke out and, while fugitives streamed out of stricken Chihuahua, they finally struck out against the tide, fighting their way to a certain mine far back in the Sierra Madres, where they could dig the gold on shares.

Behind them the battle waged; Casas Grandes was taken and retaken; Juarez, Agua Negra and Chihuahua fell; Don Porfirio, the Old Man of Mexico, went out and Madero took his place; and still they worked for their stake.

Then new arms and ammunition flowed in from across the border; Orozco and his rebel chiefs went out, and the breath of war fanned higher against the hills. At last the first broken band of rebels came straggling by, and, reading hate and envy in their lawless eyes, the Americans dug up their gold at sundown and rode all the night for their lives.

And now, welded together by all that toil and danger, they were pardners, cherishing no delusions as to each other's strength or weaknesses, but joined together for better or worse.

It was the last thing that either of them expected, but three days after they fled out of Mexico, and with all their money unspent, the hand of fate seized upon them and sent them back to another adventure.

It was early morning again, with crowds along the street, and as they ambled slowly along toward the line the men on the corners stared at them. The bunch of cowboys gazed at Bud, who sported a new pair of high-heeled boots, and knew him by the way he rode; and the mining men looked searchingly at De Lancey, as if to guess the secret of his quest.

A squad of mounted troopers, riding out on border patrol, gazed after them questioningly, but Bud and Phil rode on soberly, leading their pack, and headed for Agua Negra across the line.

It was a grim place to look at, this border town of Agua Negra, for the war had swept it twice. A broad waste of level land lay between it and the prosperous American city, and across this swath, where the Mausers and machine guns had twice mowed, lay the huddle of low houses which marked the domain of Mexico.

Fussy little customs officials, lurking like spiders in their cooped-up guardhouses, rushed out as they crossed the deep trench and demanded their permit to bear arms. The moment they crossed the line the air seemed to be pervaded with Latin excitability and Indian jealousy, but De Lancey replied in florid Spanish and before his polite assurances and fulsome compliments it was dissipated in a moment.

Made Maps and Answered Questions Until Every Detail Was Settled.

"Good! Pass on, amigos," cried the beady-eyed little jefe, pasting a label on their pack. "Adios, senor," he added, returning Phil's salute with a military flourish, and with a scornful glance at Bud he observed that the gentleman was muy caballero.

"Huh!" remarked Bud, as they rode on through the town, "we're in Mexico all right, all right. Talk with both hands and get busy with your eyebrows—and holy Joe, look at them pelones!"

The pelones referred to were a squad of Mexican federal soldiers, so-called from their heads being shaved, and they were marching doggedly to and fro through the thorny mesquit bushes in response to shouted orders from an officer. Being from Zacatecas, where the breed is short, they stood about as high as their guns; and their crumpled linen suits and flapping sandals detracted sadly from the soldierly effect.

Big and hulking, and swelling with the pride of his kind, Hooker looked them over slowly, and spoke his hidden thought.

"I wonder," he said, turning to Phil, "how many of them I could lick with one hand?"

"Well, they're nothing but a lot of petty convicts, anyway," answered De Lancey, "but here's some boys ahead that I'll bet could hold you, man for man, husky as you are, old fellow."

They were riding past a store, now serving as an improvised barracks, and romping about in the streets were a pair of tall Yaqui Indians, each decorated with a cartridge-belt about his hips in token of his military service. Laughing and grabbing for holds, they frolicked like a couple of boys until finally they closed in a grapple that revealed a sudden and pantherlike strength.

And a group of others, sunning themselves against the wall, looked up at the Americans with eyes as fearless as mountain eagles.

"Yes, that's right," admitted Bud, returning their friendly greeting, "but we'll never have no trouble with them."

"Well, these Nacionales are not so bad," defended Phil, as they passed the state soldiers of Sonora on the street, "but they're just as friendly as the Yaquis."

"Sure," jeered Bud, "when they're sober! But you get a bunch of 'em drunk and ask 'em what they think of the gringos! No, you got to show me—I've seen too much of 'em."

"You haven't seen as much of 'em as I have, yet," retorted De Lancey quickly. "I've been all over the republic, except right here in Sonora, and I swear these Sonorans here look good to me. There's no use holding a grouch against them, Bud — they haven't done us any dirt."

"No, they never had no chance," grumbled Bud, gazing grimly to the south. "But wait till the hot weather comes and the revoltosos come out of their holes; wait till them Chihuahua greasers thaw out up in the Sierras and come down to get some fresh mounts. Well, I'll tell 'em one thing," he ended, reaching down to pat his horse, "they'll never get old Copper Bottom here—not unless they steal him at night. It's all right to be cheerful about this, Phil, and you keep right on being glad, but I got a low-down hunch that we're going to get in bad."

"Well, I've got just as good a hunch," came back De Lancey, "that we're going to make a killing."

"Yes, and speaking about killings," said Bud, "you don't want to overlook that."

He pointed at a group of dismantled adobe buildings standing out on the edge of the town and flanked by a segment of whitewashed wall all spattered and breached with bullet-holes.

"There's where these prize Mexicans of yourn pulled off the biggest killing in Sonora. I was over here yesterday with that old prospector and he told me that that wall is the bull-ring. After the first big fight they gathered up three hundred and fifty men, more or less, and throwed 'em in a trench along by the wall—then they blowed it over on 'em with a few sticks of dynamite and let 'em pass for buried. No crosses or nothing. Excuse me, if they ever break loose like that—we might get planted with the rest!"

"By Jove, old top," exclaimed De Lancey, laughing teasingly, "you've certainly got the blues today. Here, take something out of this bottle and see if it won't help."

He brought out a quart bottle from his saddle-bags and Bud drank, and shuddered at the bite of it.

"All right," he said, as he passed it back, "and while we're talking, what's the matter with cutting it out on booze for this trip?"

"What are you going to drink, then?" cried De Lancey in feigned alarm, "water?"

"Well, something like that," admitted Bud. "Come on—what do you say? We might get lit up and tell something."

"Now lookee here, Bud," clamored Phil, who had had a few drinks already, "you don't mean to insinuate, do you? Next thing I know you'll be asking me to cut it out on the hay—might talk in my sleep, you know, and give the whole snap away!"

"No, you're a good boy when you're asleep, Phil," responded Bud, "but when you get about half shot it's different. Come on, now—I'll quit if you will. That's fair, ain't it?"

"What? No little toots around town? No serenading the senoritas and giving the rurales the hotfoot? Well, what's the use of living, Bud, if you can't have a little fun? Drinking don't make any difference, as long as we stick together. What's the use of swearing off—going on record in advance? We may find some fellow that we can't work any other way—we may have to go on a drunk with him in order to get his goat! But will you stick? That's the point!"

Bud glanced at him and grunted, and for a long time he rode on in silence. Before them lay a rolling plain, dipping by broad gulches and dwindling ridges to the lower levels of Old Mexico, and on the skyline, thin and blue, stood the knifelike edges of the Fortunas miles away.

With desert-trained eyes he noted the landmarks, San Juan mountain to the right, Old Niggerhead to the left, and the feather-edge of mountains far below; and as he looked he stored it away in his mind in case he should come back on the run some night.

It was not a foreboding, but the training of his kind, to note the lay of the ground, and he planned just where he would ride to keep under cover if he ever made a dash for the line. But all the time his pardner was talking of friendship and of the necessity of their sticking together.

"I'll tell you, Bud," he said at last, his voice trembling with sentiment, "whether we win or lose, I won't have a single regret as long as I know we've been true to one another. You may know Texas and Arizona, Bud, but I know Old Mexico, the land of manana and broken promises. I know the country, Bud—and the climate—and the women!

"They play the devil with the best of us, Bud, these dark-eyed senoritas! That's what makes all the trouble down here between man and man, it's these women and their ways. They're not satisfied to win a man's heart—they want him to kill somebody to show that he really loves them. By Jove, they're a fickle lot, and nothing pleases 'em more than setting man against man, one pardner against another."

"We never had any trouble yet," observed Bud sententiously.

"No, but we're likely to," protested De Lancey. "These Indian women up in the Sierras wouldn't turn anybody's head, but we're going down into the hot country now, where the girls are pretty, ta-ra, ta-ra, and we talk through the windows at midnight."

"Well, if you'll cut out the booze," said Hooker shortly, "you can have 'em all, for all of me."

"Sure, that's what you say, but wait till you see them! Oh, la, la, la"—he kissed his fingers ecstatically—"I'll be glad to see 'em myself! But listen, Bud, here's the proposition, let's take an oath right now, while we're starting out, that whatever comes up we'll always be true to each other. If one of us is wounded, the other stays with him; if he's in prison, he gets him out; if he's killed, he avenges his—"

(Continued next week)

Where There's a Will

There Is Also a Way

By BLANCHE I. GOELL

There isn't any use of living to be as old as the hills as I have unless you can do exactly as you please, especially when your own think-best is a great deal better than anybody else's think best.

Now, I'd been thinking secret-like and saying open that 'twas high time my grandniece Luella was married.

It wasn't likely that I could live on indefinitely, and it might be some amusement to me in the hereafter to recollect the features of Luella's husband.

And it would be pleasant to have a little child about, a boy or a girl, for me to pet during the few remaining years to me on earth, when one naturally inclines to the young.

I didn't know where an eligible young man was coming from in these parts. But from the minute I was born I always had an opinion on every subject, and I knew I'd find the young man somehow.

So when young Dudley Holbrook's auto turned turtle in front of my yard, and young Dudley Holbrook draped himself around my stone post and garden gate with a broken arm and a broken collar bone I had the hired man carry him straight up to the spare room.

After the doctor had set his bones and bandaged his head I sat awhile by his bed and listened to his blabbing. Then I made up my mind he'd do to marry Luella.

Nothing's so good an index of character and past actions as delirium talk, and, after I listened hard for fifty-five minutes and heard no mention of chorus girls, jack pots or other metropolitan poisons, I decided he'd do.

So, going out from the sickroom, I addressed my grandniece:

"It's a special dispensation for you, Luella, an act of Providence. This young man's name, according to cards and other memoranda in his pockets, is Dudley Holbrook. The newspapers had a deal to say last year about the fortune old Holbrook left his sons when he died. I consider this a most suitable marriage for you."

Luella's brown eyes opened wide. It's a way they have when Luella is angry. But I won't tolerate anger in a young person and prepared to say so. But all that Luella uttered was:

"What about the young man, and what about Freddie?"

My grandniece has a most annoying habit of bringing up topics wholly irrelevant to the subject under discussion. What had my grandnephew Freddie to do with the question?

"Freddie!" I stormed. "Don't you dare think of marrying Freddie! If ever I had such an idea in my head for you 'twas when he was in kilts and not in college. Freddie indeed! There is too much society about Freddie. It's all frat and varsity and varsity and frat. Too much society, I say. I won't have you marry Freddie!"

I went back to the sickroom and took another look at the injured young man. He had a strong body, a clear, fresh skin and a look about the part of him that wasn't bandaged that told me he hadn't abused the money his father had left him.

So, having made up my mind that if the young man didn't die he should marry Luella, I felt quite comfortable to have her future settled.

He didn't die, and I interviewed him often in the days when he was getting well in my front spare room. Everything I learned was to my satisfaction.

He wasn't entangled with any other girl, had no family connections nearer than China, was sound physically and nothing extraordinary mentally. Luella had often been unruly in her childhood, but I didn't care to punish her to the extent of tying her for life to any man of genius.

So the third week that the young man lay in my front spare room, up one flight, I came to the point very plainly.

"What do you think of my grandniece Luella?" I demanded bluntly.

The boy flushed and turned uneasily in bed.

"She's ripping, isn't she? So straight and strong! Sometimes I hear her singing when she runs off down the garden. She does all sorts of things, doesn't she? Once, when I was propped up in bed staring out at the apple trees, I saw her run down the slope and leap the little brook. Took it splendidly. Gee! I wish I was up and could go walking with her!"

"She's a good, sensible girl, is Luella." I looked him squarely in the eye. "Young man, you'll go a long way before you'll see another such girl as Luella."

"I believe you!" he cried fervently.

So in my mind 'twas as good as settled.

Things went on just as I meant they should. But because I made no more mention of my plans Luella seemed to think I'd forgotten them, and she didn't once demur when I sent her in every afternoon to read to the invalid.

The young man got well, of course, but he didn't go away. He declared my old country place was the most delightful spot in New England and that he felt more at home there than elsewhere. Of course I wasn't fool enough to think my old farm was enchanting a healthy young man who'd traveled over Europe, Asia and Africa, but I didn't say anything. I let him stay.

And one day he blurted out what I knew must come:

"Mrs. Thayer, I'm in love with Luella. You've been mighty good to me this summer—taken me in off the road, patched up my wounds, kept me on faith. I owe you a lot already. Are you willing I should speak to Luella and make my debt of gratitude to you all the bigger?"

"Why do you say all this to me?" I demanded. "You're not in love with me, are you?"

"Good heavens, no!" he ejaculated, and then he looked frightened when I glared at him.

"Then don't waste your time talking to me," I retorted.

Things were going so much to my liking that I felt free to drive to the village and have my lawyer draw up a new will and attend to various other tangled legal affairs.

'Twas somewhat absorbing, because that lawyer thinks he must do things in a certain way, but I know what I want, and my way's always best.

These matters preoccupied my time so much that I didn't have much leisure to give to the young folks' matrimonial arrangements, which I supposed were progressing according to the lines I'd laid out. But when young Holbrook burst into my presence, looking kind of wild and dejected, I saw at once I'd have to give more time to his affairs.

"What's the matter?"

He splashed round the room desperately.

"I'm six feet tall, broad shouldered proportionately, look manly enough, don't I?" he demanded angrily. "I never thought my worst enemy could say I wasn't masculine. But Luella treats me as if I were sentimental and silly and—effeminate. I've tried in every way imaginable, but somehow I can't get at it—the proposal, I mean. She won't walk or drive with me any more; she won't let me get near the subject. This afternoon I made up my mind I'd say it somehow. And where did I find her? In the barn—superintending the packing of the egg crates! You don't want your niece to spend her time in the barn counting eggs—now, do you, Mrs. Thayer?"

"It's just as well to keep our own figures as to how many eggs the men ship, when there's nothing more important on hand," I answered sagely.

He dissented impatiently.

"Well, I said to her: 'I've something awfully important I want to say to you. Can't you give me a little time alone?' She sent the man and maid away, and then she whirled round with her watch out. 'We've got to get these crates off for the afternoon train,' she declared. 'I can give you just five minutes. Now, say what you want.' Hang it all, how can a man propose across a dozen crates of eggs?"

I had suspected this practical trait in Luella, but never dreamed it had developed to this extent. I seized my gold headed cane and pounded vigorously.

"Luella, come here!"

The girl came, flushed from running.

"Luella, give this young man more than five minutes. He wants to marry you."

"I—I love you!" he stammered. "Luella, will you have me?"

"No!" cried Luella furiously. "Never!"

"Hoity toity!" I exclaimed in anger. "Of course you'll have him, Luella. I've made up my mind to it. I won't be gainsaid."

"I won't be married offhand to the first stranger who pitches himself across our front door yard!" cried Luella passionately, her eyes widening. "I won't—I won't—I won't!"

I was amazed at Luella. Never have I seen such a display of obstinate pigheadedness in any individual, and after I had made up my mind to this advantageous marriage the first day I saw the young man. It was preposterous!

I stamped my cane upon the floor, but forced myself to keep calm.

"Luella," I said with finality, "I have decided it is most advantageous for you to marry Dudley A. Holbrook."

"Hold on," the young man interrupted; "I'm not Dudley A. Holbrook. He's the rich New Yorker."

It always irritates me to be interrupted, particularly by young people. And this interruption was especially annoying, as it made Luella flare up. She turned on me like a whirlwind.

"It serves you right, Aunt Myra, that he isn't the rich Dudley Holbrook. It shows you the futility of such sordid matchmaking—trying to marry a girl off in that way—your own niece, too—it's outrageous!"

Something caught in Luella's voice, and the tears brimmed over in her brown eyes. Waterworks don't affect me, but the young man sprang toward her eagerly.

"Luella, did you turn me down because you thought I was the Dudley A. Holbrook?"

"Yes," came in muffled tones from Luella's averted head.

"Will you reconsider now that you know I'm just Dudley Holbrook and I love you?"

Luella's brown eyes met his eager gaze, and the anger died away in them. Then she flung back her head and looked at me defiantly.

"Yes!" her voice rang out triumphantly.

But, bless you, I only laughed within myself, for, as I said in the beginning, I know my own think-best is a deal better than anybody else's think-best.

And I'd known for a long time that the young man wasn't the Dudley Holbrook!